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SUBJECT: VIETNAM - CHINA COUNTERNARCOTICS COOPERATION

Ref: 04 Hanoi 1584

1. (U) Summary: In 2004 China and Vietnam made an effort to increase counternarcotics cooperation both along the border and at the policy level. This effort culminated in a December 2004 joint case that resulted in several arrests and the seizure of 10.3 kilograms of heroin. Despite this high-profile case, in general the long and rugged border severely complicates counternarcotics cooperation. On the Vietnamese side, low capacity and limited counternarcotics resources at the border are also handicaps. End Summary.

LONG AND DIFFICULT BORDER

2. (U) With four international, three national and 14 local crossings along the 1,463-kilometer border between Vietnam and China, in addition to numerous scattered forest paths, drug trafficking in the border region is an ever worsening problem. Most of the border lies in rugged terrain with rivers, mountains and forests. Smuggling can only be limited, not completely suppressed, due to these uncontrollable "forest paths," said Mr. Duong Thoi Giang, Vice Chairman of the Lang Son Provincial People's Committee in a press interview. In addition, according to an article in "An Ninh Thu Do" ("Capital Security") Newspaper, there are only 50 narcotics enforcement officers in the Border Army and Sea Police forces, responsible for the entire 8,000-kilometer land border and one million square kilometers of territorial waters. Major General Trinh Ngoc Huyen, Vietnam Border Army General Commander, noted during the nationwide counter-drug review conference in Hanoi in March 2004 that the lack of equipment and poor interagency coordination also make the long and difficult border harder to control.

BILATERAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

3. (U) Despite the difficult border and lack of resources, drug control forces have had some successes. According to "Ha Noi Moi" ("New Hanoi") Newspaper, in December 2004 the police of Lang Son Province and their Chinese counterparts cracked the first significant drug case between Vietnam and China. The joint operation (in which the two sides operated separately on their own sides of the border) began in November 2004. On December 12 the police arrested Ha Tay Province resident Nguyen Thi Nga along with two other traffickers and 150 addicts. Police seized 10.3 kilograms of heroin. During the campaign, the Chinese side mobilized 900 police officers and 177 vehicles of various types, the paper reported. In addition to this large case, authorities from both sides of the border seized about 4,000 vials of addictive pharmaceuticals, more than 6 kilograms of heroin and almost 100 grams of cocaine in 2004, according to Vietnam's Standing Office of Drug Control (SODC).

SENIOR OFFICIALS ALSO GIVE A HAND

4. (U) In the common bid to strengthen bilateral counternarcotics cooperation, on April 14, 2004, Vietnam and China held in Hanoi their first conference on cooperation for security and combating crime at the border. Chinese Vice Minister of Public Security Zhao Yongji led a 21-member delegation to the conference. Le Hong Anh, Politburo member and Vietnam's Minister of Public Security, said that the two sides would "expand cooperation in combating crimes and maintaining border security to ensure that the people live in safety." During the conference, the participants discussed, among other issues, measures to combat drug-running and signed a Memorandum of Understanding on combating crimes and maintaining security at the border. The second conference is expected in Beijing in 2006.

5. (U) At the local level, the Lao Cai Provincial Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (DOLISA) organized a study tour in Yunnan, China in October 2004. In addition, under the Denmark-funded UNODC sub-regional project VIE/H61 to strengthen cooperation among law enforcement offices in

East Asia, Mong Cai town authorities in Quanh Ninh Province and their Dongxing counterparts in Guangxi Province have coordinated via their border liaison offices (BLO) to share investigative information.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) Vietnamese and Chinese counternarcotics taskforces are operating close to their maximum capacity in the absence of a clearly demarcated border. Currently, local border disputes (often between farmers over land or residents over the location of a gravesite) frequently erupt and require the intervention of border army forces. Vietnamese interlocutors say the two sides cannot do a better job now without the facilitation of the land border treaty. Until those issues are resolved, cooperation will remain cosmetic, notwithstanding December's big seizure. The lack of equipment, resources and training on the Vietnamese side complicates the effort further, a problem USG assistance to the GVN through the UNODC Joint Task Force project (reftel) aims to solve.

MARINE